

The Board of Education of the Borough of Essex Fells, in the County of Essex, New Jersey, convened in a Regular Meeting held in the Media Center on September 18, 2024. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Amanda Haber, at 7:30 P.M. Mrs. Haber read the following Statement of Compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act: "In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Laws of 1975, a notice for this meeting was posted at the respective offices of the Essex Fells School as of January 3rd, 2024. Agendas were mailed to the Clerk of the Borough of Essex Fells, the Progress, and the Star Ledger.

I. Call to Order – 7:30 P.M.

- The meeting was called to order by the Board President

II. Roll Call

Mrs. Amanda Haber, President-Present
 Mr. John Toth, Vice-President-Absent
 Mr. Raj Mehta-Present
 Mrs. Caragh Lavoie-Present
 Mrs. Jacquelyn Burke-Present

Also present: Dr. Michelle V. Gadaleta, Superintendent/Principal; Mr. Steven J. Lella, Business Administrator/Board Secretary, 5 Staff member (2 left at 7:40pm), Approximately 27 Public (16 left at 7:40pm) and Mayor Edward A. Davis.

III. Flag Salute

- The Board President led the flag salute.

IV. President's Report

- Mrs. Haber congratulated the EFS Students who were recognized for the TOP NJSLA scores, and reminded the Public of the procedure for the Public Comment portion of the meeting.

V. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

- None

VI. Superintendent's Report

- Good evening, everyone and welcome to our first Board of Education meeting of the school year. It is my pleasure to begin my report tonight focusing on students and academic excellence here at Essex Fells School. Tonight, we honor three students who have earned the highest possible score on the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment in the spring of 2024. Recognizing students for educational achievements is a highlight for our Board of Education, staff, and now extended community. We are fortunate to be surrounded by students who work extremely hard in their classrooms day in and day out. When those qualities are rewarded and validated through the independent application of cumulatively learned skills, one cannot feel anything less than pure joy and pride. At this time, I would like to call forward Mr. Lawrence Alexander-Darville, Miss Maeve Dykema, and Miss Olivia Milano. Olivia is recognized this evening for her score of 850 on the Mathematics portion of the NJ State Assessment, while Wren and Maeve are recognized for their scores of 850 on the English/Language Arts portion of the New Jersey State Assessment. Please join me in a well-deserved round of applause for these accomplished students. Thank you for joining us this evening. You are welcome to stay for the remainder of the meeting however, are not required to do so should you want to leave to celebrate with your families.

I would like to personally thank all of the families who attended Back to School Night last week to hear our teacher presentations and learn about the expectations for your students this school year. 160 of our 166 families were represented in our classrooms. This is an incredible percentage, which will only strengthen the partnership between you and your child's

teacher(s) as you journey through this academic year. Thank you again for your participation. An additional thank you to the PTA for organizing and executing a successful book fair, which culminated that evening.

This year's school photo sessions were successfully completed last Friday. Four photographers from School House Pictures were able to photograph our staff, the entire student body, as well as homerooms and individual students within school hours. With a growing number of sibling requests, we pivoted to holding those sessions after dismissal time for parents to take advantage of if they wished. We were able to accommodate 35 families who registered for sibling photographs before the 4 PM closure. Thank you to Mrs. Rivera for all of her help organizing the schedule.

As many of you know, Essex Fells School has been challenged in the last couple of years with an increasing number of student conflicts, and a show of disrespect for the expectations of student behavior. This is not isolated to a couple of incidents or a few students, but an overall change in the culture and climate of our school which is having an impact on our academic environment.

Over the last two years, I have reported to you that an increase in counseling services, social emotional learning and character education lessons have been a priority to provide further support to our student body. After much observation, it was clear that the least structured environments of lunch and recess continued to be the primary source for conflict, disrespect for staff and fellow students, and teary-eyed disagreements, many of which led to a disruption to the afternoon academic periods.

This circumstance was the catalyst for my proactive and comprehensive approach to the restructuring of lunch and recess moving into the 2024-2025 school year.

With numerous requests from parents about a separation of their children from others during class list development, it only seemed natural to honor that culture during our unstructured periods, as well.

Additionally, a multi-tiered approach of age groups offers our small school environment a greater opportunity for mingling with different peers, forging new relationships, and expanding mentorship opportunities for students which all are backed by research to yield positive outcomes. This has clearly been evidenced on our very own playground in the short 9-day period of recesses that our students have participated in thus far this school year. Third graders teaching kindergartners how to pump on the swings, sixth graders teaching fourth graders the rules of kickball, and numerous multi grade sports are occurring every day in a calmer and more mindful approach to play.

This, coupled with counselors at every recess, full staff participation as lunch monitors, increased supervision, and equalized enrollment numbers during each lunch and recess session, are proving that the results are achieving a less competitive and safer atmosphere with fewer incidents carrying over into instructional time.

With that being said, multiple families have expressed their displeasure with these improvements largely because they would like their children to socialize with the other students at their respective grade levels. Additionally, a vast majority of parents suggested stronger consequences for those not abiding by code of conduct expectations.

Since my philosophy focuses on a more proactive approach to solving an issue during these tender developmental years rather than reactive discipline, I created an ad hoc committee of parents and staff members to further discuss potential lunch/recess options moving forward.

All perspectives were heard and the common thread was that we needed to gather more information. Everyone agreed that a week of recess was not only too soon to tell that the new system was a success, but also too soon to assume that it wasn't.

Therefore, we will continue to monitor the situation while also reintroducing whole grade recess days back into the schedule one day at a time so that observations can be made in comparison to the different approaches. Students will be made privy to this plan and expectations during Class Meetings over the course of the next week prior to its onboarding on Tuesdays, beginning October 1st. It will then be discussed as a whole school at our Spirit Meeting on October 4th. If overall positive conduct and minimal classroom disruptions, (due to recess issues) can be maintained, additional days will be added into the schedule gradually. It is my hope that this compromise will not only provide students with an opportunity to socialize with their grade level peers, but also maintain the motivation to exercise mindful interactions with one another during all lunch and recess periods.

Further updates and results of committee meetings will be shared with the school community via the Week at a Glance as we continue to navigate the updates to these schedules.

Thank you to those parents who expressed relevant and valid concerns in regards to this topic, in a manner that breeds progress and partnership. For this is how we can model for our young people that Studies Pass Into Character to continue the tradition of excellence in education at Essex Fells School.

Thank you, this concludes my report.

- Mrs. Lavoie thanked Dr. Gadaleta for her response and plan to address lunch/recess, as well as the feedback.
- Mrs. Haber thanked Dr. Gadaleta for her report and the feedback she had received.

VII. Superintendent's Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01–09.

- 1. RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the payment of the following travel related expenses in accordance with the travel policy 6471 for Professional Development:

Staff Member(s): Marco Pannullo
Event: ISC CC Exam
Location: East Orange, NJ
Date: 9/19/24
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Marco Pannullo
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair, NJ
Date: 9/20/24, 10/18/24, 11/15/24, 12/16/24, 1/17/25, 2/7/25, 3/11/25, 3/12/25, 4/11/25, 5/16/25, 6/5/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Kimberly Trafford
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair, NJ
Date: 9/20/24, 10/18/24, 11/15/24, 12/16/24, 1/17/25, 2/7/25, 3/11/25, 3/12/25, 4/11/25, 5/16/25, 6/5/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Kristen Kowalski
Event: Conquer Mathematics
Location: Pompton Plains, NJ
Date: 10/1/24, 11/6/24, 11/26/24
Cost: \$570.00

Staff Member(s): Kristen Kowalski
Event: IXL Live
Location: Morristown, NJ
Date: 10/17/24
Cost: \$107.00

Staff Member(s): Mary Renz
Event: School Nurses: Best Strategies for Success During School Medical Emergencies

Location: Virtual
Date: 10/28/24
Cost: \$295.00

Staff Member(s): John Thomas
Event: IPN and IAQ
Location: Mahwah, NJ
Date: 2/7/25 & 2/24/25
Cost: \$20.68

Moved by: Mrs. Burke

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent the appointment of, Sophie Kearny, Substitute Teacher for the school year 2024-2025, pending the usual criminal history, background check and county approval.

Moved by: Mrs. Burke

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request extension for the following:

PTA Meetings – Media Center 8:45-9:45am

Dates: 9/19/24, 10/10/24, 11/14/24, 12/12/24, 1/9/25, 2/6/25, 3/6/25, 4/3/25, 5/8/25, 6/12/25

Moved by: Mrs. Burke

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request extension for the following:

EFFEE Meetings – Media Center 7:00pm-9:00pm

Dates: 10/8/24, 11/12/24, 12/10/24, 1/14/25, 2/11/25, 3/11/25, 4/8/25, 5/13/25, 6/10/25

Moved by: Mrs. Burke

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

5. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request extension for the following:

1st Grade Girl Scouts – Gymnasium 3:05pm-4:15pm

Dates: 10/18/24, 11/22/24, 12/13/24, 1/17/25, 2/7/25, 3/7/25, 4/11/25, 5/16/25, 6/6/25

Moved by: Mrs. Burke

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

6. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request extension for the following:

3rd Grade Brownies – Gymnasium 3:05pm-4:15pm
 Dates: 10/4/24, 12/6/24, 1/10/25, 2/28/25, 4/4/25, 5/2/25, 6/13/25

Moved by: Mrs. Burke Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4 Nays: 0

7. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request extension for the following:

EFFEE - Fall 2024 Enrichment Programs
 10/7/24 – 12/20/24
 Gymnasium & Classrooms

Moved by: Mrs. Burke Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4 Nays: 0

8. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request extension for the following:

6th Grade Car Wash
 10/6/24 9:30am-1:30pm
 Blacktop & Grounds

Moved by: Mrs. Burke Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4 Nays: 0

9. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the second reading and adoption of the following bylaws/policies/regulations:

P 0141	Board Member Number and Term (Revised)
P 0141.1	Board Member Number and Term – Sending District
	(Revised)
P 0141.2	Board Member Number and Term – Receiving District
	(Revised)
P 0164.6	Remote Public Board Meetings During a Declared
	Emergency (M) (Abolished)
P 2200	Curriculum Content (M) (Revised)
P & R 3160	Physical Examination (M) (Revised)
P & R 4160	Physical Examination (M) (Revised)
R 5200	Attendance (M) (Revised)
P 5337	Service Animals (Revised)
P 5350	Student Suicide Prevention (M) (Revised)
P 7231	Gifts From Vendors (M) (Abolished)
P 8420	Emergency and Crisis Situations (M) (Revised)
P & R 8467	Firearms and Weapons (M) (Revised)
P 9181	Volunteer Athletic Coaches and Co-Curricular Activity
	Advisors/Assistants (Revised)

Moved by: Mrs. Burke Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4 Nays: 0

VIII. Business Administrator's Report

- Mr. Lella just reminded the BOE members to complete their annual NJSBA training, if they have not done so already

IX. Business Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Business Resolutions #01-06.

1. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts the minutes of the following meeting(s):

Regular Meeting Minutes	August 21 st , 2024
Executive Meeting Minutes	August 21 st , 2024

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mrs. Burke
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Ayes: 4	Nays: 0
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2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves bills and claims for September in the amount of \$370,693.85; as certified by the Business Administrator/Board Secretary; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approves the payroll for August as certified by the Business Administrator and approved by the Superintendent and Board President in the total amount of \$80,016.61 including \$74,502.59 for the gross payroll, \$3,344.40 for the Board's share of FICA/Medicare and \$2,169.62 for the State's share of FICA/Medicare.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mrs. Burke
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Ayes: 4	Nays: 0
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3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves the transfer of funds for the month of July and for August as certified by the Business Administrator and authorized by the Superintendent of Schools.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mrs. Burke
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Ayes: 4	Nays: 0
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4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves an additional 2 (two) 2024 summer hours for Judi Reynolds, Summer Lead Teacher at \$65 per hour.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mrs. Burke
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Ayes: 4	Nays: 0
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5. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves an additional 26.5 (twenty six and a half) 2024 summer hours for Kimberly Trafford, Summer Technology Support at \$65 per hour, for transition.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mrs. Burke
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Ayes: 4	Nays: 0
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6. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts the 6th grade gift to Essex Fells School of a Digital Marquee in the amount of \$11,800.00.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mrs. Burke
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Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

X. Old Business / Board Discussion

- The Board will reschedule the October 2nd workshop for October 1st. Mr. Lella will provide the public notice.

XI. New Business / Board Discussion

- None

XII. Public Comment

- Mr. Lella reminded the public of the procedure for the public comment section of the meeting.
- Mr. Michael Lyne asked what was being done to protect the children during lunch/recess.
- Ms. Melissa Slomienski noted that she has lived in Essex Fells for 12 years. She spoke about the change to the lunch/recess period, and voiced concern about having to deal with conflicts. She doesn't want something in place that constricts the children during recess.
- Ms. Sarah Kessler voiced her concerns with the children's interactions during lunch/recess. She wants the children to feel comfortable without the fear of penalty.
- Ms. Oubina Sandra ?? is a time kindergarten parent and had some concerns about the younger children. She feels all children should interact and make friends.
- Mrs. Gabrielle Steiner provided some feedback she had heard. She feels we should be teaching the children to manage conflict resolution. Are other districts implementing this same type of segregation? She noted the children are not able to see all their friends and that her child wants to play not feel like she has to babysit. Doesn't like that some children are feeling isolated and lonely.
- Mrs. Angela Lateraza is a 3rd grade parent. She recognizes the conflict resolution lessons. She feels there should be transparency and that parents can reinforce positive behavior at home.
- Ms. Sarah Henderson echoed what the other parents had stated. She loves the lunch committee idea as well as open communication.
- Mrs. Jenna Maffucci noted that she works in a school district, and that the incidents being reported at lunch are not unique to just Essex Fells. She noted where she is they are dealing with the same issues however without the same amount of staff and support. She feels we are doing a great job addressing mental health and understands the expectations of children's growth. She suggested if we could create more structure at recess, and further discuss code of conduct vs. mental health, and how to address.
- Mrs. Sara Deni just wanted to piggyback off what the other parents had said. She has twins in third grade and wants them to be together, and that her children spent the first day after school talking about lunch and recess. She also noted that in the 5th grade there are only 8 girls in the class and this does not allow them much time together. She feels discouraged that some children are stressed over recess.
- Mrs. Natasha Downes stated she was upset that the children have to wait to see their friends, and she was upset that her daughter only gets to see 2 or 3 of her friends each day.
- Ms. Courtney Alpert noted that she is very proud that her daughter is outgoing, but felt that this limits her time to be with her friends.
- Mrs. Belinda O'Donnell noted that her family wasn't happy with the class lists, which felt like some of the good kids were being punished. One day her son didn't want to go to school. She asked what percentage of children were causing the issues? She feels upset for her son.
- Mr. Rob Lateraza thanked Dr. Gadaleta and the Board for being creative to address the lunch/recess issues, and also appreciated Mrs. Lavoie's comment. He felt the overall issue was that some parents felt blindsided and that keeping communication open with the parents is important.
- Mrs. Haber thanked the public for all of their opinions and for advocating for their children. The Board is appreciative of all the feedback.
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XIII. Resolution to Enter Executive Session

WHEREAS the following subject is not appropriate to be discussed in a public meeting and is within the exemptions which may be discussed and acted upon and,

WHEREAS only the following subject(s) shall be discussed in private recess by the Board and the minutes made available to the public as soon as the reason for exemption no longer exists, it is therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED at the Public Meeting of the Essex Fells Board of Education on this day Wednesday, September 18, 2024, pursuant to Sections 7 & 8 of the Open Public Meetings Act, the following subject(s) shall be discussed in a session of the Board closed to the public:

Please be advised that the Board will be going into executive session for approximately one hour for the purpose of discussing legal matters, personnel & student privacy. Action will not be taken in public after the executive session.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

XIV. Adjournment

RESOLVED that this public meeting of the Board of Education be adjourned at 9:09 P.M. The next regular meeting of the Board of Education will be held on **Tuesday, October 01, 2024, at 7:30 P.M.** in the Media Center.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. burke

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary ☐